

UX Analysis of *Kingdom Come: Deliverance*

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Purpose

The purpose of this document is to identify issues with the user experience (UX) of playing the game *Kingdom Come: Deliverance* and offer suggestions for improvement. UX here differs from gameplay in that the focus is not on concepts such as world/level design, content design, or story. There is a strong focus on user interface (UI) design, but also a general critique of how the player is made able to draw information from the game to understand their situation in-game and go about gameplay in an informed manner.

The following points are issues in the user experience of playing the game, predominantly with keyboard and mouse, and sometimes with with a Microsoft Xbox controller. Some points differ between play with either control system and many points stand regardless of controls used. The issues are categorized according to some of the ten usability heuristics devised by Jakob Nielsen, selected and modified for their relevance to video game UX, along with additional heuristics that were informed by gameplay across multiple games, for a total of eight heuristics. Suggestions provided are quick, unpolished options for possibly solving the problems presented, and should inspire rather than define one's own solutions to these problems. Going forward, I will refer to the person or people playing the game as "the player" or "the players", and refer to the in-game player avatar as "Henry".

Game Version: 1.8.2

Heuristics

Visibility of system status: The system should always keep users informed about what is going on, through appropriate feedback within reasonable time.

Match between interface and game world: The interface system should speak the world's language, with words, phrases and concepts native to that universe, rather than modern colloquial terms. Show how the game's language relates to controls and status indicators.

Consistency and standards: Users should not have to wonder whether different words, situations, or actions mean the same thing. Follow platform and game world conventions.

Informed failure: Games must allow for mistakes and failure to make risks and loss meaningful, but such errors must be due to poor planning or bad strategy, rather than ignorance due to the game's failure to provide necessary information. Exceptions include scenarios wherein ignorance or powerlessness on the character's or player's part is desired.

Reference:

<https://www.nngroup.com/articles/ten-usability-heuristics/>

Heuristics Continued

Recognition rather than recall: Minimize the user's memory load by making objects, actions, and options visible. The user should not have to remember information from one part of the dialogue to another. Instructions for use of the system should be visible or easily retrievable whenever appropriate.

Efficiency of play: In just about any game, certain actions are universally the most frequently taken. Examples include taking all of a weightless valuable into one's inventory, accepting quick and free help, confirming a choice to engage in default gameplay, etc. For customizable games and variant control schemes, allow users to tailor frequent actions. Don't waste players' time.

Help and documentation: Even though it is better if the system can be used without documentation, it may be necessary to provide help and documentation. Any such information should be easy to search, focused on the user's task, list concrete steps to be carried out, and not be too large.

Suspension of play: Gameplay can be beneficially suspended in situations such as pause menus, inventories, dialogues, and cutscenes. Ensure that such suspensions don't detract from enjoyment of the game, and that the transition between suspended and active play allows for players to reassume control.

Reference:

<https://www.nngroup.com/articles/ten-usability-heuristics/>

Heuristics - Severity

Each heuristic will be graded on a scale of 0-4 to determine the severity of the game's usability issues.

0 = I don't believe this is a usability problem

1 = Cosmetic problem only: need not be fixed unless extra time is available

2 = Minor usability problem: fixing this should be given low priority. I also include missed UX opportunities under this rating.

3 = Major usability problem: important to fix, so should be given high priority

4 = Usability catastrophe: imperative to fix this before game can be released

OK/Excellent	Cosmetic	Minor	Major	Catastrophe
0	1	2	3	4

Reference:

<https://www.nngroup.com/articles/how-to-rate-the-severity-of-usability-problems/>

Evaluation

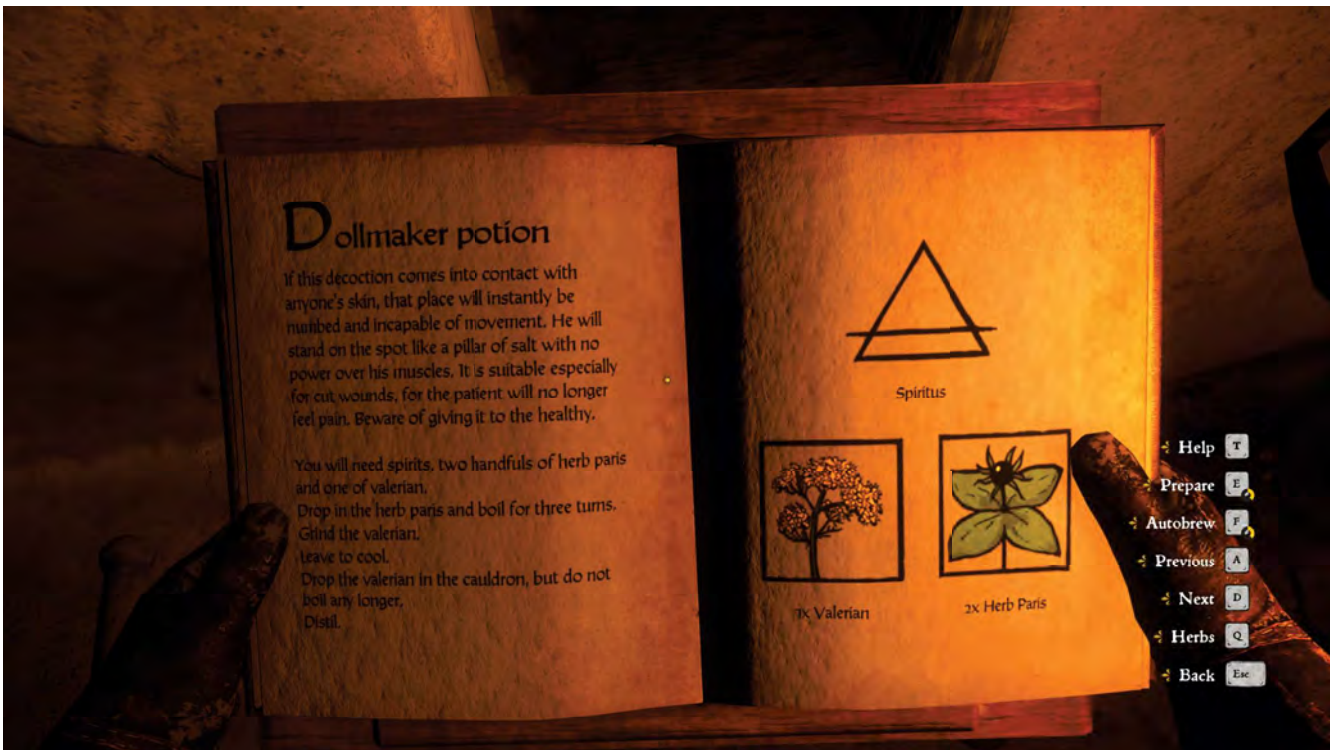
Efficiency of Play, Visibility of System Status



Severity

OK/Excellent	Cosmetic	Minor	Major	Catastrophe
0	1	2	3	4

When searching for a potion recipe, the player has to turn through much of the recipe book before reaching many potions, a problem which worsens as they collect more recipes. A related problem is that the recipes are not alphabetized, so the player won't be able to guess what recipe precedes or follows their current recipe without memorizing the order.



It took me **14** page turns to reach Dollmaker Potion in my book.

Suggestion:

Consider adding a table of contents to the start of the recipe book. The player would use this to select from their known recipes and turn directly to a given recipe's respective page. Henry could point his finger at each entry as the player cycles through recipes. Also, alphabetize the recipes.

Evaluation

Efficiency of Play



Severity

OK/Excellent	Cosmetic	Minor	Major	Catastrophe
0	1	2	3	4

When finishing a potion in Alchemy, the location of the distillation retort gets in the way of the vials, sometime interrupting the player when trying to select a vial. In the event that the player has a potion boiling for a set time and is looking to cut the boil time short by finishing the potion, this obstruction can easily be a problem.



As you can see, the retort can still be selected even when the cursor is above the vials.

Suggestions:

Raise the vial shelf just a little bit, to keep these two tools separated.

Evaluation

Efficiency of Play, Visibility of System Status



Severity

OK/Excellent	Cosmetic	Minor	Major	Catastrophe
0	1	2	3	4

When picking herbs, the prompt to collect the herb often fails to appear, even when the cursor is over the plant. It seems that the hitboxes for herbs are a bit small, thus creating this problem.



I am unable to pick these marigolds without jiggling the mouse to find the right position.

Suggestion:

Whatever mechanism you use to determine that the player can reach and pick an herb, revisit these herb hitboxes to make them a bit easier to select.

Evaluation

Match between Interface and Game World



Severity

OK/Excellent	Cosmetic	Missed Opportunity	Major	Catastrophe
0	1	2	3	4

Archery is tough. I am well aware that you designed it to be a challenge, eschewing an aiming reticle for instinctive aiming, as it would look in real life. What is more, I do a bit of hobby archery, and agree that you have largely succeeded in replicating the feel of where the arrow flies based on its position in the bow, and that placing a successful shot is very rewarding. However, the difficulty of making reliably precise shots at even close to medium range prevents the player from choosing an archery-heavy playstyle, needing to either switch quickly to a melee weapon after shooting at—and hopefully hitting—an enemy once or twice, or to rely on stealth to allow them to loose arrows and run away, like a silly game of cat and mouse. I think this strategy would feel more fitting with an implemented crossbow weapon, which I'm sure would get players excited.

Such difficulty is well suited to Hardcore Mode, where the melee combat star is also removed. I would suggest, however, that you implement an archery reticle either for non-Hardcore Mode in general, or as an option available in the settings menu.



Evaluation

Visibility of System Status



Severity

OK/Excellent	Cosmetic	Minor	Major	Catastrophe
0	1	2	3	4

Some recipe books still display a star on their icon, suggesting they are new/unread, after being learned/read. This does not happen as the player reads these for the first time, but typically when the books are looted after being learned.



Why do two of these books have stars on their icons, when I've already read them?

Suggestion:

Only display these stars on unread/unfinished books.

Evaluation

Efficiency of Play



Severity

OK/Excellent	Cosmetic	Minor	Major	Catastrophe
0	1	2	3	4

Many items in the game have no notable use whatsoever, other than to hold value and be sold later. While these “trade items” can add some important flavor to the game world, they typically clutter the inventory and exhaust carrying capacity. Additionally, the player needs to navigate their inventory to find each item to sell, consuming time and possibly skipping over some items.



A silver goblet, two books that have already been read, and raven feathers after I have completed their quest. I will want to sell all of these to the next merchant.

Suggestions:

Designate a button or command for “Sell all Junk”, that moves all crosses, goblets, read books, and other clutter to the Shopping Cart for selling.

Evaluation

Visibility of System Status, Recognition vs. Recall



Severity

OK/Excellent	Cosmetic	Minor	Major	Catastrophe
0	1	2	3	4

The Item Info window blocks out valuable information from the current item and similar items, preventing the player from easily comparing items when the window is up. They also cannot choose any of the now-covered sorting options for their items.



Current

Suggestion



Suggestion:

The window can be moved to the right without obstructing much critical information, showing more useful item info overall. Otherwise, you may find it helpful to simply play around with the window size to see if it can be smaller.

Evaluation

Match between Interface and Game World



Severity

OK/Excellent	Cosmetic	Minor	Major	Catastrophe
0	1	2	3	4

I feel compelled to say that I love how you managed to keep the entirety of the interface for rebuilding Pribislavitz immersed in the context of the game world, in this case, within a book and dialogue with the locator. As soon as the player selects a project to build, Henry slaps the book closed, looks up, and excitedly proclaims that there's work to be done, after which his trusty locator jumps into action, moving to the build site at a spirited jog that doesn't force the player to pace themselves if they want to follow him. Overall an excellent experience.

